

## [Savoy Ballroom]

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### SAVOY BALLROOM

The Savoy ballroom was jammed. The ball was large but there didn't seem to be any room for any one. The ceiling was high but it seemed to turn into a huge piston that kept pounding the air down hotly. From the rear you could hardly hear the orchestra. There were gangs of noise, couples and solos. There was as much noise as long sheets of rattling tin being unfurled. But it was not a metallic noise. It was husky and vibrant.

There were white tooth and black faces shining with sweat. Loud laughter gurgled through the thick air. The dancing was tense, barely movable in spots. Bodies groveled agonizingly against each other. They were insinuating bodies, come to them, with take me faces. The music was slow and physical, and the dancing was slow and physical.

Suddenly a break in the jam occurred. A pair of legs kicked out, and kicked forward. Space had to be cleared. There was no stopping that gang of legs and arms and jerking bodies.

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There was no stopping that gang of music. Oh, beat it, boy. Hit it, boy. Heat it, boy. There had never been any dancing like that since St. Vitus. You got a lift out of watching the abandonment. It stirred through your spine, and that feeling got all around. Nobody was alone.

Some of the people got the idea that they would get a better lift if they could take a ride on Louis Armstrong's trumpet, if they could get closer to the band. They started to move up. There was a stream coming and going, both flowing against each other. You had to wrangle 2 tangle, squash and lurch through buttock yielding and muscle unyielding bodies.

A girl had fainted. She was being carried out by a couple of men. The closeness had gotten her. Part of her rich brown thighs gleamed above strong carrying arms. Some of the women were frightened. But there was that terrific ride Louis Armstrong was going to give them on his trumpet. They ducked in behind their men into the stream full of boulders. Vapors seemed to rise from their impact. Man, man, nobody knew where all the people had come from. Man, man, nobody know how come there was so much sweat in a body.

There were many people deep away from the band stand. They just listened and flicked white handkerchiefs into the air, only to become wet against necks and foreheads. Some of the boys worked right with the orchestra. They listened the hard way, the "jitterbug" way: thumping the floor with their feet and leading the orchestra with pecking heads and jiggling shoulders. They felt no pain. There was no pain in rhythm, only in nostalgia.

Armstrong took up a trumpet solo, rising clear and solid above the ensemble. It seemed like there was a terrible weight upon him and he was lifting it higher and higher until he was clear of it and out in open fields. Man, man, how that boy hits it. Heads shook reverently. Listen to that boy beat it out.

He was playing a familiar tune: Stardust. A girl had her eyes half closed. She was sixteen and in love, alone in the vast audience, 3 alone among people. Her face was a tortured inland lake in a strong wind. The song came out of her throat in a hum from deep within

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her bosom. There were no words: her voice, and other vibrating voices, was just a part of the inflecting band that gave Armstrong the base to improvise. He carefully punched the notes out of his trumpet. His cheeks were balled and his eyes were closed. His trumpet flashed upward to high C, flashed downward as he slurred through the scale, tried to break the scale down. He squeezed his guts into the instrument. There was no stopping that man. He was out of the world. There was only his imagination and his instrument, Man, man!

He improvised about eight choruses, each one varied with a new value. Then the saxophones took the lead with a pathetic and rich vibrato. Nobody was alone. Each spine passed on its stirred feeling to another. When Armstrong sang his voice seemed to pounce out of his belly. It was husky and enveloping like a fog. His head swayed from his deeply felt body. You couldn't get the words, but you got the idea. The words were sappy anyhow. He gave them meaning and structure. His inarticulate deepness gave the song body.

On full orchestration, with Armstrong inspiring his musicians, you could feel the sound and rhythm vibrating from the floor.

The audience received the effects and they sent the power back. The orchestra renewed their efforts with more strength, more abandonment, more passion. There was a perfect integration which made for 4 great playing and great feeling. Doggone, how that boy do it! Doggone that Satchmo! God dog it! Nobody had heard a body blow a horn like that Satchmo since Gabriel! Doggone that Gate Mouth. What he do to a body!